



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-1196
401-222-2080

Donald L. Carcieri
Governor

November 1, 2005

Dr. David Gifford
Director
Rhode Island Department of Health
Three Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Dr. Gifford:

Earlier today, President Bush released the National Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan. As the potential for pandemic influenza in the United States is a very real threat, we must continue to pursue statewide efforts to address all aspects of this issue, and to coordinate with all levels of government – federal, state and local – as well as with various community, private and volunteer organizations.

As you and I have discussed on several occasions, pandemic flu has the potential to compromise the health of thousands of Rhode Islanders. While straining our health care system, pandemic flu could also inhibit our ability to provide and maintain essential services at all levels of government and the private sector.

During our recent meeting with Robert Warren, Director of the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA), I instructed you to form and chair a Pandemic Flu Working Group comprised of state officials. The Working Group is charged with finalizing the state's comprehensive plan for preventing and responding to an outbreak of pandemic influenza in Rhode Island. The Working Group will include the Department of Health, the Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Environmental Management, the Office of Health and Human Services, the National Guard, and the Department of Administration. The Working Group is also authorized to tap the resources of other state departments to the extent their participation furthers the mission and helps you complete your work expeditiously.

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Rhode Island must be prepared to prevent or mitigate any adverse impact that pandemic flu poses to our citizens. For this reason, I ask that the Working Group report back to me with a final, comprehensive plan no later than December 20, 2005.

The Department of Health and the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency have already begun to undertake a number of initiatives to begin to prepare Rhode Island to prevent and to respond to an outbreak of pandemic flu. While finalizing work on the comprehensive plan, the Pandemic Flu Working Group should continue to develop and implement initiatives already in progress, including, but not limited to:

- Increasing surveillance for an influenza outbreak in Rhode Island;
- Acquiring technology and training to test for avian flu strain (H5N1) in laboratories;
- Developing a plan to acquire tamiflu to supplement the federal supply;
- Revising the plan for pandemic flu based on the response to Katrina and the federal plan;
- Working with hospitals to address building capacity to handle an increased number of sick persons;
- Working with the State Veterinarian to increase surveillance and treatment plans for infected animals;
- Creating a Public Health Directory of licensed health care workers and facilities to more quickly communicate to the health care community; and
- Working with the Medical Reserve Corps to help address additional service needs.

Finally, I am aware that global and national issues impact the supply of tamiflu, the leading vaccine for treating pandemic flu. While the federal government has already begun to stockpile supplies of tamiflu in order to address a national outbreak, Rhode Island must be prepared to bolster the national effort. Consequently, I recently authorized the Department of Health to expend whatever resources necessary to obtain as large a supply of tamiflu as possible. The Department of Health should continue to act diligently and prudently to purchase available supplies of tamiflu as the Working Group finalizes the comprehensive plans.

Thank you for your continued work on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Donald L. Carcieri", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Donald L. Carcieri
Governor